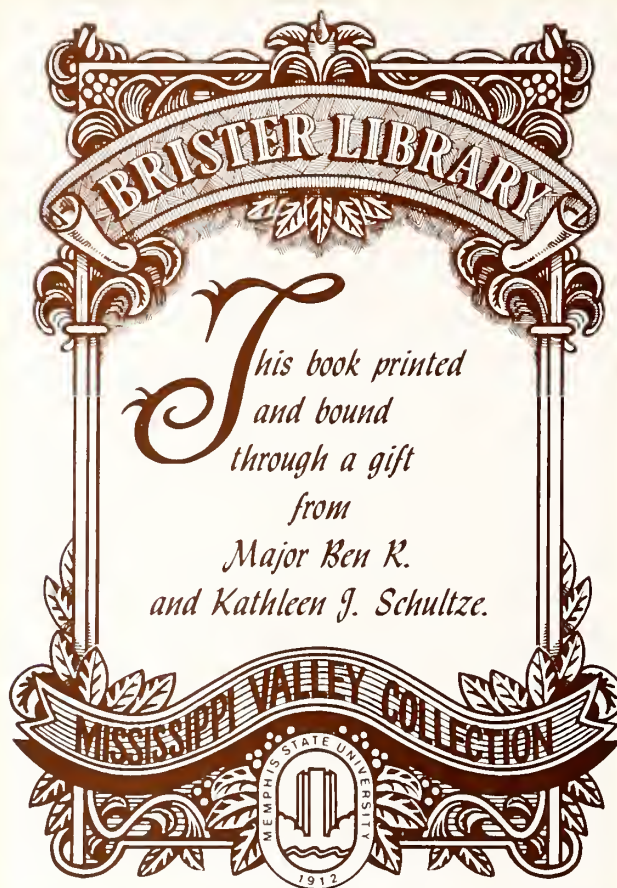


"MEMPHIS POLITICS DURING THE CRUMP ERA"
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NELL ASPERO

BY - S. GLENDA MANESS
TRANSCRIBER: S. GLENDA MANESS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NELL ASPERO

MARCH 25, 1988

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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NELL ASPERO

MARCH 25, 1988

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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That this interview will be used by no one except the interviewee, with no restriction except one copy to be provided to and the interviewer, _____

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PLACE 1796 Fayetteville

DATE March 25, 1958

Nell Aspero

(Interviewee)

Glenda Manero

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library of
Memphis State University)

THIS IS A PROJECT OF THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE DATE IS MARCH 25, 1988. THE PLACE IS THE HOME OF MRS. NELL ASPERO ON FAXON AVENUE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MRS. ASPERO. THE INTERVIEWER IS S. GLENDA MANESS, A GRADUATE STUDENT FROM THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY HISTORY DEPARTMENT. TRANSCRIPTION BY S. GLENDA MANESS. THE SUBJECT IS MEMPHIS POLITICS DURING THE CRUMP ERA.

S.G. MANESS: Mrs. Aspero, first I would like to ask you about your background, who your parents are and where they are from. Were they born in Memphis?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, my mother and her family lived in Alcorn County, Mississippi. Corinth is the county seat and I was born there. My father was in the cottonseed oil business but he died when I was quite young and my mother brought me to Memphis and established a home in Memphis. She bought a bungalow. My first school was Cummings and then we moved to the northeast section of Memphis, which isn't considered east now, but is near Overton Park and near the zoo, where she bought a home.

S.G. MANESS: What was that address? Do you remember?

MRS. ASPERO: Seventeen ninety Faxon.

S.G. MANESS: This home that you are
 living in now?

MRS. ASPERO: It's the home that I live in
 now but at that time it was a
bungalow. It was near Trinity Methodist Church of
which my mother immediately became a member and
sent me to. It was near Snowden School--one block
from the school. That was the real reason for her
purchasing this particular house. I graduated as
valedictorian of Snowden Grammar School in 1922.
Then I went to Central High and graduated in 1926.
I was very active in Trinity Methodist Church.
Played the piano all over the church. It was a
little church in those days. It was just a little
frame building facing Evergreen. The big
structure was built in 1925.

 In the meantime, I had studied expression,
which was a very popular thing for little girls to
study in those days. Some people called it
elocution. I was known as a reader around town.
Then when I was nine years old, 1918, I think it
was, I started taking piano lessons and joined the
Beethoven Club. At the present time, I'm the
oldest member in point of tenure [chuckles] of the
Beethoven Club. I'm very proud of that because it
is a wonderful organization. It is going to

celebrate its one hundredth anniversary next fall.
The Beethoven Club.

S.G. MANESS: This makes how many years you
have been a member?

MRS. ASPERO: 1918.

GLENDA MANESS: Seventy years.

MRS. ASPERO: Sometime, I think it was
while I was in grammar school,
that Mrs. Edward Vieh--The Vieh Bakeries will be
remembered very pleasantly in Memphis. Mr. and
Mrs. Vieh and their family lived up the street
from us. She had called my mother one evening
[and] asked her if I would give their son, Eugene,
piano lessons. Well, my mother says,--I think I
was eleven, at that time and had never thought of
teaching anyone. Mrs. Vieh insisted. Wanted to
know--and my mother said, "Well if Nell wants to,
she can."

Mrs. Vieh said, "Well, how much would she
charge?"

My mother said, "Well, I have no idea." And
somehow Mrs. Vieh and my mother hit on fifty
cents a lesson. So I began teaching and I think I
was eleven years old. And a few months after
that, a friend of theirs, Frances Manning, wanted
to study with me. One of the early pupils was
Ruby Pearson, who lived in the neighborhood. So,

by the time, I got to high school, I had a little piano class and was saving my money for a grand piano. After studying with the leading piano teacher for beginners, my mother transferred me to the Bohlmann School of Music, which was a very fine school of music headed by Mr. Theodor Bohlmann, who was from Berlin. I studied first with Mrs. Hattie Hon of that school and obtained my certificate in piano and music from her, after giving a piano recital, alone, at the Bohlmann School of Music. Then I began to study with Mr. Bohlmann, himself. He was a very strict teacher. A very fine artist but a very hard master.

In the meantime, I continued my studies at Central High. Mr. Bohlmann and Mr. Grosso, who was the violin teacher at the Bohlmann School, came to Central High at my invitation and [they] gave a recital on the stage in the auditorium at which I introduced them. Then, in 1926, I graduated from Central and received the medal from the United Daughters of the Confederacy for the best essay written of any high school student in Memphis on Leonidas Polk, Bishop General of the Civil War. Perry Bishop Polk was a Confederate General. That was presented to me at graduation time.

At that time, my main interest was music,

although I had had some interest in law. My mother had a very dear friend who visited in our home and was one of the first three women lawyers.

S.G. MANESS: What was her name?

MRS. ASPERO: Mrs. Frances Wolf. Mrs. Wolf gave me various books and stimulated my interest in law, although I had become so well established as a musician and had the piano class, which was enlarging all the time, I thought that my only interest would be in music. So when I graduated from high school, I built my piano class, I think it was into eighteen pupils, which I taught at my home, which was situated, as I said, just a block from Snowden School. This was a very important factor because the pupils could stop here on their way to school in the morning and take their lessons. I taught my first one at 6:45 in the morning, had four pupils before school. Then when I began going to Southwestern College...

S.G. MANESS: What year was that?

MRS. ASPERO: Well I became a special student. The Superintendent of Memphis City Schools, at that time, was a very fine school man who had been Commissioner of Education for the State, Superintendent R.L. Jones. He was a personal friend of President

Diehl of Southwestern. Superintendent Jones took me out to Southwestern to call on Dr. Diehl. Dr. Diehl said, yes, I could be enrolled as a special student with three subjects. In those days, everyone who went to Southwestern had to take Bible. So it was Bible, English--I think the third subject was French.

S.G. MANESS: No history?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't think it was History then. I think it was French.

After while--I was studying to graduate in piano and I was practicing six hours a day--I found it was just too heavy to practice the piano six hours a day and teach my pupils and prepare my studies for college. So I dropped out of college after one semester. That was in 1927 and graduated in piano in 1928. Then I studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and continued to teach.

S.G. MANESS: Did you teach in Boston?

MRS. ASPERO: No, I came back to Memphis and taught and that was getting into the Depression. In 1930, my mother, in her educational work at the Board of Education, heard of a Professor Cate who had come to Memphis and was teaching class piano lessons at Memphis State University. In her usual farsighted manner, she

suggested that I study this course of class piano teaching with Professor Cate. And I did and then began to teach, first at Snowden Grammar School, after school on Tuesdays and Fridays, a class of twenty in a class at twenty-five cents apiece. In those days they couldn't afford private lessons but everybody who had a child who wanted to study piano could afford twenty-five cents a lesson. That was just two dollars a month. I had a big class and it was soon realized that some were more talented than others. I am trying to think when I went back to college. Anyway, out of that class, there grew a group that I taught at my home. I think maybe there were ten in the class at home and out of that group came private pupils.

S.G. MANESS: These were the more advanced
 of the students.

MRS. ASPERO: Well, they were more
 interested and more determined
to learn [laughs], I'll put it that way, instead
of merely talented because talent is really
developed interest. So in the heart of the
Depression, everyone was crying 'cause they
couldn't make enough money to live on, I had a
class of ninety piano pupils of these various
types and was making about \$300 a month, which was
a fabulous amount of money in those days.

S.G. MANESS: During the Depression, yes it was.

MRS. ASPERO: It was equal to maybe a couple of thousand nowadays. I continued--Oh, am I going into too much detail? About 1930, I wanted to study medicine. I wanted to become an ear, nose and throat specialist. I had so much sinus trouble and allergy. In those days, they didn't know what an allergy was. They didn't think there was such a thing when allergy first was determined as a speciality. I suffered a long time with allergy and nobody knew how to treat it. Anyway, I started to Memphis State to take the pre-med.

S.G. MANESS: Was it called Memphis State at that time?

MRS. ASPERO: It was called Memphis State Teachers College.

S.G. MANESS: West Tennessee?

MRS. ASPERO: West Tennessee.

S.G. MANESS: Normal College.

MRS. ASPERO: No, it was not called Normal when I went there. It had been called Normal.

S.G. MANESS: Okay.

MRS. ASPERO: It was founded in 1912 but then they dropped the name,

"Normal," and it was West Tennessee State...

S.G. MANESS: Teachers...

MRS. ASPERO: I don't think they had the name Teachers in it then. Well, so I went out there and took Chemistry and various subjects that were required for pre-med. In the meantime, I had gone to Dr. Hyman. Dr. and Mrs. Hyman were personal friends of mine. He was Dean of the College of Medicine. Dr. Hyman did everything he could to discourage me from studying medicine. He pointed out the leading woman physician of that time was Dr. Meriam Drane. And he says, "Well, now look at Dr. Drane. She never did get married. [Ha] Well, a few years after that Dr. Drane did get married. But anyway, I went on and took my pre-med but it was such a conflict because these scientific laboratories for chemistry and physics were in the afternoons. And the afternoons were when I had to teach my piano pupils so I dropped out of the pre-med.

But it was while I was still going to Memphis State that I went to see Dr. Diehl, the President of Southwestern it was, now Rhodes College, to ask him if I could rent Hardie Auditorium for a recital for my pupils. And Dr. Diehl says, "Miss Nell, you do not belong out there at the teacher's college [it was called, in those days], you belong

here. You must come back to Southwestern."

Well, my mother's dear friend, Miss Harriet Beckham, was instrumental in establishing Tri Delta Sorority at Southwestern at that time. She, of course, wanted me to come back to Southwestern, also. And I did transfer to Southwestern. I think it was in the fall of 1931. I got my degree, a Bachelor of Arts at Southwestern in 1933. I was still teaching piano.

After I got my B.A., I went to New York and took graduate work in music education at Columbia University. Then I came back and continued teaching and realized that with very little additional courses I could get a Bachelor of Science at Memphis State. By that time, it seemed like I had developed a great interest in studying. I liked to study. So I went and got my Bachelor of Science at Memphis State. That was in 1934. And continued to teach. I am trying to think when I started studying the law. I think it was in 1936. I grew weary of mothers saying that Little Johnny or little Mary would not practice. Well I don't think there ever was a child who would practice without being urged. I just got tired of trying to reason with these mothers who thought the child ought to go automatically to the piano so I started studying law. And that, as I said, was an

interest that had had its beginning when, as a child, Mrs. Frances Wolf used to visit in my home.

I went to the University of Memphis night school, at first, which had excellent lawyers who practiced here and judges.

S.G. MANESS: Was that Memphis State?

MRS. ASPERO: No, that was the University of Memphis, College of Law. See that was way before, way before Memphis State had a law school. Then I went to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville to take some of my law courses--Contracts and Agency. I was the only woman in the law school in 1936. I came back here.

S.G. MANESS: How did the male students treat you?

MRS. ASPERO: Perfectly well. And Dean Witham and Professor Wicker. I heard by the grapevine, that Professor Wicker was asked how I did as a student in his class of Agency. And he said, "Well, she does a lot better than most of the men."

So. [laughs] Oh, I think I did lead the classes up there that summer. I was only there in the summertime. But I came back here to the University of Memphis. That was a very old school. Established I think about 1910. It

became merged with Memphis State when Memphis State established its law school--whenever it was. I think it was in the '60s. So it became merged. But I have never have received my Juris Doctor Degree to which I feel I am entitled because I had two degrees before I started studying law. That's a requirement now that you have one degree before you begin the study of law. Back when I was graduated and took the bar examination and passed as third in the state, the only requirement was that you have a high school education or the equivalent to study law. The equivalent was age eighteen. It was a tragic situation as far as education went.

S.G. MANESS: How many years was the law school?

MRS. ASPERO: It was a three-year law school. That's what it is today. But I finished it in, I think it was a year and ten months that I took all the courses. And then you took the bar examination and if you passed you could practice. Well, by that time, I had developed a love of degrees so I had my license--I took the bar exam in January of 1938--and my license was awarded in April of 1938 but I continued in school until I got my LLB. That was the degree that was granted in those days.

That was Bachelor of Laws. I never heard of the degree, Juris Doctorate, or Doctor of Jurisprudence. In those days, I don't think they had those degrees. And now the only Memphian I know of who is qualified and in a similar position --and we have been battling our heads against the various deans of the Memphis State Law School to grant us a Juris Doctorate--is Doctor [McCarthy] DeMere, plastic surgeon. Of course he has a Bachelor of Science from Southwestern and Doctor of Medicine and a LLB. Well, he wants the JD, too. It's nothing but vanity, I guess, that makes us want it because I don't know what we'd do with it.

When I had a private office downtown, of course I had my licenses and degrees all around the wall. I was very proud of them. But I think it's just a matter of principle. I think they should grant us that JD and they just haven't done it.

S.G. MANESS: Where did you start practicing?
Did you set up your own practice?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes, right here, in this very room where I had my piano. That was in the summer of 1938 and I bought my desk. I know this is getting into too much detail. I never will forget how proud I was of

the desk. Of course I had bought the piano right after I graduated from high school with the money that I had saved from teaching.

S.G. MANESS: From your first job?

MRS. ASPERO: And my mother gave me the upright piano as a down payment on the grand. That summer of 1938, I bought this desk, at which I practiced for fifty years, for forty dollars from S.C. Toof and Company. I still think it is a very beautiful desk, artistic, the way it's paneled in the front with the drawer pulls and everything. That was in the summer of '38. I had some friends whose husbands were doctors and dentists. I began collecting their accounts--the way I began practice. I know I'm going into too much detail.

S.G. MANESS: Did you move your practice from the house?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, that was later. Then I was asked to aid in developing a law requiring the beauty operators and the beauticians of Tennessee to have a license. Kastens Beauty Shop, a leading beauty shop and beauty school and the instructor there, a very lovely lady who was a Christian Science reader, was Mrs. Betty Hall Sharp. I think that was just before I had actually received my license. [They

asked me if I would help in forming an association which we named the Tennessee Beauticians Association with the objective of getting a law through the legislature, which I did in 1939, after many trips to Nashville.

S.G. MANESS: And the beauticians were all females?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, there were a few who were teachers and owned beauty schools who were men. But the operators--I don't think any of the operators -- were men unless they were owners of schools. From that time on, my practice grew. I had so many friends. I had grown up here. I had worlds of friends that I knew who came to me with various types of business. Of course the beauty operators had their types of business. There were a number with divorces, although, I never specialized in divorces. The business grew and grew and grew. I know I'm getting into too much detail.

S.G. MANESS: When did you first remove your practice from your home?

MRS. ASPERO: Let's see, I'm talking about 1939, now. I think it was in 1940 that I became a partner with a very elderly lawyer, Mr. Thomas F. East. We represented the various doctors and dentists who had the

Physicians Business Bureau collect their delinquent accounts. About 1940. I was with Mr. East about a year in the Goodwyn Institute Building at Third and Madison where the First Tennessee Bank is now. That next summer, I moved my office to the Columbian Mutual Tower which is now called Lincoln American Tower. [I] practiced there and that's where I met my husband who was also practicing in that building and was associated with a long time friend of mine who introduced him, Mr. Aspero, introduced him to my mother and me. We practiced separately, however.

S.G. MANESS: This friend, what was his name?

MRS. ASPERO: His name was John Franklin.
Mr. Aspero served in World War II for four years.

S.G. MANESS: Was this before you married?

MRS. ASPERO: Before we married. For four years and then when he was discharged from the army in 1945, in November, we married in June of 1946.

S.G. MANESS: You actually met him in 1941 before he went in the service?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. We did not...

S.G. MANESS: Did you correspond while he was in service?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes, in those days, they reduced the letters to a little microfilm to send overseas to spare the space and the weight. Yes, he served in the [side 2] Adjutant General's Department in England and in France and then after the war ended, he served in Germany. [He] was finally discharged, as I said in November, 1945. We formed a partnership after we were married. It was known first as Aspero and Sanders because I was so well known and had established quite a reputation as a labor lawyer.

S.G. MANESS: Now, where was this office?

MRS. ASPERO: Still in the Columbian Mutual Towers.

S.G. MANESS: Same building. Okay.

MRS. ASPERO In those days, you could not find office space to rent but if you already had office space--and I had three offices--I took a fourth one and we enlarged the suite and he had a private office and I had one, too. After awhile, we changed the name to Aspero and Aspero. That's about enough about me, isn't it?

S.G. MANESS: Okay. When did you first meet E.H. Crump, do you remember?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, my first recollection of

Mr. Crump was when my mother and our family went to Hardy, Arkansas, for a vacation. I was about six years old. And Mr. Crump and Mrs. Crump and their family were there for a vacation. The place to swim at Hardy was Spring River, a beautifully clear, clean river. And I recall the Crump boys helping me swim with water wings. You blew up the water wings and lay on them and that supported you while you paddled around.

S.G. MANESS: All the [Crump] boys were there, the whole family?

MRS. ASPERO: The whole family was there. I remember Mrs. Crump was a very gracious lovely lady and Mr. Crump had fiery red hair in those days.

S.G. MANESS: Your first impression, did he scare you?

MRS. ASPERO: No. No. He was always very courtly and very much a gentleman and the boys were well behaved and very friendly and nice.

S.G. MANESS: But to a six year old, he did not intimidate you as a six year old?

MRS. ASPERO: No. No. Mr. Crump was very, very nice. Now all of my

recollections of Mr. Crump are very friendly.
Now, let me see [gets legal pad with notes on it].

S.G. MANESS: Did you ever work with him?

MRS. ASPERO: I never worked for him for
pay. I worked for the Crump
Machine in that I was a lieutenant here in this
thirty-sixth ward, first precinct.

S.G. MANESS: What year was that?

MRS. ASPERO: Well...

S.G. MANESS: About?
[pause while Mrs. Aspero tries
to remember]

S.G. MANESS: What were your duties as a
lieutenant?

MRS. ASPERO: Well the first recollection I
had is doing what was called
selling poll tax receipts. In those days, you had
to pay two dollars in order to vote. That of
course has been abolished later. I recall working
up and down the street selling the poll tax
receipts, it was called. In other words, I would
collect two dollars and I would write a poll tax
receipt out for the resident of the home and they
in turn would qualify to vote. Then I recall
handing out literature for Mr. Crump's candidates
at the polls. I always worked under...

S.G. MANESS: Are these Mr. Crump's candi-

dates or when he was a candidate?

MRS. ASPERO: No, it's his candidates, the ones that Mr. Crump thought were proper to elect. In those days, politics, in a way, was very simple because nobody who opposed Mr. Crump was going to be elected. So you just voted like Mr. Crump wanted you to.

S.G. MANESS: How could that be?

MRS. ASPERO: Well very few ever ran against Mr. Crump's candidates.

S.G. MANESS: So if he ran a candidate then nobody would oppose him.

MRS. ASPERO: Most people were afraid to oppose because they thought they would lose. I remember when I was a little girl--I guess maybe I was in grammar school, maybe in high school--handing out literature at the polls for Mr. Crump's candidates. A friend of ours, I recall, came to the poll and says, "Now, where is the Republican Primary?"

Well, in those days, there were no nice people down South who were Republicans. They were all Democrats. Well, this gentleman was from Ohio. From Cincinnati. So where was the Republican Primary. Well, I didn't know where it was. I don't know whether he ever found out.

[laughs] But I worked under the direction of Mr. Bob Hugo and Gordon Hollingsworth.

S.G. MANESS: And what were they with Mr. Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. Hollingsworth was the director of the ward, the thirty-sixth ward and Mr. Hugo of the first precinct of the thirty-sixth ward.

S.G. MANESS: That was this area?

MRS. ASPERO: That was this area [near Faxon and McLean]. The ballots, in those days, were printed on thin paper that you could see through. They were marked with ink. That was long before voting machines. There were little cubbyholes at the polls that you could go for privacy. You marked your ballot in ink but we knew when the ballot was put in the box and handed to one of us to put in the ballot box, to see through the paper, the location of the "X". So we knew how that person had voted. If they had voted against Mr. Crump's friends who were candidates, we made notes of it and reported it.

S.G. MANESS: Reported it to?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, I would report to Mr. Hugo.

S.G. MANESS: And he would report to Mr. Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know who he reported to but it was somebody.

S.G. MANESS: And then did he write these names down, did he keep a record?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, he kept a card file of every voter in the precinct.

S.G. MANESS: Why did he want a card of people that voted against him?

MRS. ASPERO: The card file. The card file. Oh, you asked if there were any repercussions of the ones that voted against Mr. Crump's candidates. I don't know but I do remember, and this was about 1938 or '39, one of our neighbors coming to me, a gentlemen, and this man, I think he was an employee of the WPA, the Works Progress Administration during President Roosevelt's administration. He thought I had turned in a bad report on him. He came to see me. In fact, I had not turned in a bad report. But it was rather pathetic to see this big fine looking man, how distressed he was and how afraid he was that he might lose his job. Of course I assured him that I had not turned in a bad report. Now I don't know where he got the impression, either, except I guess it was generally known that I did help with the elections and was a friend of Mr.

Crump.

S.G. MANESS: Had he voted against Mr. Crump's candidate?

MRS. ASPERO: Not that I know of. But maybe he had and maybe that's why he was concerned. He knew what he had done.

S.G. MANESS: Do you know of any cases where people who voted against his candidate actually lost their jobs?

MRS. ASPERO: Only by hearsay. I know there was a lawyer. There were several lawyers. There was one lawyer named Brown. I don't remember his first name. He left Memphis. I think he moved to Nashville because at some outing, I believe it was down at Moon Lake, he was asked to play cards with Mr. Crump. And he replied that he did not care to play cards. My understanding, I don't know whether it was through the newspaper or how it was, that he was given to understand that he was not welcome to practice law in Memphis any longer. You did what Mr. Crump wanted or you suffered the consequences.

Fortunately, I was always friendly. Mr. Crump never gave me any instructions. I liked Mr. Crump. I thought Mr. Crump was excellent. And I still think he was a benevolent dictator. He was a wonderful influence for Memphis and performed

miraculous improvements for Memphis in government. He was always interested in the best for Memphis in government. He was always interested in the best for the Memphis citizens.

Another thing that I do know. A lawyer named Ben Kohn--I do not know what it was that Mr. Kohn did that displeased Mr. Crump--but the newspapers reported that Mr. Kohn was thoroughly beaten up down in front of the Sterick Building, I believe it was. The general impression was that he had opposed Mr. Crump. That I cannot remember.

S.G. MANESS: And he had him beat up?

MRS. ASPERO: That was the impression from the newspapers. Mr. [Edward] Meeman, was the editor of the Press Scimitar in those days which was the afternoon paper. Mr. Meeman was in violent opposition to Mr. Crump. That was well known. As long as Mr. Meeman was editor, he opposed Mr. Crump and whatever Mr. Crump stood for. There were a number of editors of The Commercial Appeal. I don't recall that any of them opposed Mr. Crump.

S.G. MANESS: They were positive in their reports about him? How did Mr. Meeman contradict him? Did he try to have candidates run against him or did he write editorials?

MRS. ASPERO: He'd write editorials. I just can't remember the details, although I had great respect for Mr. Meeman. Seems to me like Mr. Crump opposed Mr. Meeman. Ooh he circulated scandalous untruths, we thought, about Mr. Meeman.

S.G. MANESS: You thought Mr. Crump...

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. Crump caused to be circulated the report that Mr. Meeman was a gay. Of course Mr. Meeman was not married. I don't think he ever had been.

S.G. MANESS: But you still backed him and believed in him even after...

MRS. ASPERO: He was a very brilliant man, Mr. Meeman, and edited a very fine newspaper, the Press Scimitar, and I knew a number of the reporters for Press Scimitar although I don't think I ever knew Mr. Meeman personally. But that was one instance, that was the big thorn in Mr. Crump's flesh was Mr. Meeman.

S.G. MANESS: Did it not upset you that he told white lies about Mr. Meeman, insinuated that he was gay?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall that it bothered me. I liked Mr. Crump. [laughs] I wouldn't have thought it was proper for him to circulate untruths but I don't

recall that I thought much about it one way or another. Let me see here. [looks at her notepad]

Mr. Crump went to Battle Creek, Michigan, to the Battle Creek Sanitorium in the summertime for treatments. Mr. Crump took excellent care of his health and he believed in the Battle Creek treatments which he took in the summer. He went to Hot Springs for treatments--massages and various treatments--in the wintertime.

S.G. MANESS: Did he go to the races?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh yes, he would go to the races but I don't recall whether he ever bet on the races or not. I took my mother to Hot Springs after an illness in the winter of 1942. I remember being very impressed, unfavorably, with the sales tax in Arkansas. At that time, we had no sales tax in Tennessee. And I remember writing Mr. Crump and telling him how wonderful I thought it was that he had kept sales tax out of Tennessee. Because he was the one that done it. He always opposed a sales tax.

S.G. MANESS: And he fought the sales tax?

MRS. ASPERO: He fought the sales tax.

Ultimately, of course, it took place in Tennessee. Going back to the polls and the elections, on election days we would work

those card files and when the voters had not come in to cast the vote, we would telephone them and tell them we would send cars, automobiles, to get them to bring them to the polls. We did everything we could to urge them to come. Not to vote any certain way but it was a psychological impression that the people would be grateful for being brought to the polls and most of them would vote for Mr. Crump's candidates.

S.G. MANESS: What about the people who
 couldn't read? What did you
do in cases like that?

MRS. ASPERO: Now I never had anything to do
 with that. I don't like to
repeat bad rumors I heard about Mr. Crump's
lieutenants in other parts of the county.

[Tony Aspero, Jr. enters and Mrs. Aspero introduces
the interviewer to him. The tape is temporarily
cut off.]

Well, I would not like for this to be quoted by me.
[The conversation that transpired here was not
recorded and the recorder was again cut off.]

Oh yes, after I became a lawyer, I would walk
down Adams [Street] and Mr. Crump's office--he was
in the insurance business--and his office was in
what was then the North Memphis Savings Bank
Building. It was a very small, six-story yellow

brick building at the corner of Main and Adams. I think the E.H. Crump Company bought that building since that time. Mr. Crump's office was on the second floor. In the mornings, about a quarter to ten, I had to go to court so I would walk along that side of the street. Of course I would always speak to Mr. Crump if he was out. I remember one morning he said, "Miss Sanders, you're doing some mighty big things for anybody so young. How old are you?"

He was always very formal. He would always call people "Miss" and "Mr." I don't know about the Mr. but Miss--he always called me Miss. I told him--at that time I was twenty-nine. He said, "Well, that's mighty young." You have to remember in those days, I was the pioneer woman lawyer. Miss Wolf was dead by that time. There was just one or two or three.

But I will say this, in another time, he had just recommended James Pleasants to be Criminal Court Judge and another time Mr. Crump says, "Now, Miss Sanders, what do you think about Jim Pleasants as judge."

And I said, "Oh, he's fine, Mr. Crump." [laughs] I had not been before Mr. Pleasants. As far as I was concerned, he was all right. Not too long after that, he committed suicide. Pleasants.

You can take this down.

S.G. MANESS: I am. [Indicates recorder
is back on]

MRS. ASPERO: Are you?

S.G. MANESS: Had he had a controversy with
Mr. Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: No, I don't think so. Mr.
Crump liked Pleasants and
he...

S.G. MANESS: He backed him. He helped put
him in?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. He was the one who rec-
ommended him to be a criminal
court judge.

S.G. MANESS: How did he feel about that?

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. Crump was very sensitive
to what people thought--just
like he was asking me. Now a young woman lawyer--
and certainly I did not occupy any status
comparable to some of the men lawyers that Mr.
Crump relied on--and he wanted my opinion. What
did I think.

S.G. MANESS: But he sort of took a poll of
many people didn't he?

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. Crump wanted to please
people and if there was anybody
that he had appointed that he found did not act in

the manner in which he felt they should act. He removed them from office. Let me see?

S.G. MANESS: Was there much crime in Memphis while he was...?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall. No. Not much crime.

S.G. MANESS: What about prohibition? Memphis had prohibition and he still let the saloons stay open.

MRS. ASPERO: Now I don't have any knowledge of that. I can recall when there was prohibition and moonshine and speakeasies. But I never visited a speakeasy in Memphis. First one I ever saw was in Chicago and that was when I had graduated from college. And my mother and aunt went with me. I wanted to see a speakeasy. But anyway, I don't think Mr. Crump allowed any speakeasies here. He wanted his people that he had confidence in to deliver the proper goods. In other words they had to be "A" number one. And if they didn't act right in the office to which he had had them appointed, he saw that they got out of that office.

S.G. MANESS: He was ousted.

MRS. ASPERO: Now that was way before--I think that was before I was ever born. It's in the law books. All I know was

in the law books.

S.G. MANESS: You didn't have any opinion?

MRS. ASPERO: No. None at all. But that
was before he achieved the
power that he gained later.

S.G. MANESS: But he was mayor. This was in
1915, I believe, when the
Ouster Bill was signed.

MRS. ASPERO: Well now again, I was in
grammar school then.

S.G. MANESS: And this was because he would
not close the saloons and he
was the mayor.

MRS. ASPERO: I don't remember that. I don't
even remember what was in the
opinion that was in the law books. I'm sure I
read it but I don't remember. And that, as I
said, was when I was in grammar school.

S.G. MANESS: I thought perhaps your mother
had discussed it.

MRS. ASPERO: No. But now I talked about my
helping in the thirty-sixth
ward, first precinct.

S.G. MANESS: You said you helped in the pre-
cinct. You don't believe
there was any stuffing of the ballot boxes except
in the North [referring to conversation that was

not recorded] or was that just a rumor that he had his lieutenants stuff the ballot boxes?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, it wasn't called stuffing the ballot boxes but it was in the newspapers that Mr. Barrett and maybe others did haul their black employees--and you have to remember, too, that the blacks in those days worked in a very subdued capacity.

S.G. MANESS: Who paid their poll tax?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, I don't know but they would have had to have poll tax receipts or they couldn't have voted. I forget exactly what date but the poll tax was abolished by the way of an amendment to the United States Constitution. I remember seeing that when I was speaking on the Constitution last year. I had forgotten that was the way it was abolished. And I don't recall that there was anything in Tennessee other than the amendment to the United States Constitution. Now, I remember vividly we used to have big rallies in those days when there was an election in the offing. And I remember presiding over a rally in Hein Park which is in our thirty-sixth ward. Hein Park is a very exclusive residential section. Beautiful homes over there. And everybody was invited to the rally. Watermelon was served after the rally.

S.G. MANESS: This was what year?

MRS. ASPERO: I think I was a lawyer then.

Maybe 1940. In that era. I remember they had a platform built in Hein Park. I recall introducing Cliff Davis who was running for Congress and Colonel Bacon. Now we were very fond, my mother and I, of Colonel Bacon. I don't know what he was running for because he was one of the squires. He was one of the better justices of the peace in the days before the general sessions courts.

S.G. MANESS: Was Mr. Crump mayor then?

MRS. ASPERO: No, no. I don't know who was mayor.

S.G. MANESS: Was he elected in '39? 1939.

Was he mayor in 1939 and then resigned?

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. Crump, I think, was just mayor for one day. Something like that and immediately resigned and then he served in Congress.

S.G. MANESS: He put Watkins Overton in as Mayor?

MRS. ASPERO: Could be. Could be because Watkins Overton and Mr. Crump were very, very good friends.

S.G. MANESS: What was their relationship?

MRS. ASPERO: No kinship. But I think
 Watkins Overton had always
seen eye to eye with Mr. Crump and whatever Mr.
Crump wanted, I think, Mr. Overton helped him
achieve. I think Watkins Overton was a good
mayor.

The first time Gordon Browning ran for
governor, Mr. Crump supported him. And Governor
Browning served his first term, I think it was two
years. I remember attending, I think it was a
banquet down at the Hotel Gayoso, for Governor
Browning and Governor Browning sang, "The
Tennessee Waltz." He loved to sing it and he was
a very fine man in a lot of respects but Mr. Crump
fell out with him and I don't remember why.
[laughs] So he was reelected that second term but
that was a very disastrous term for Governor
Browning. Mr. Crump was opposing him. I remember
that Mr. Crump got a federal order out from the
federal court and Judge John D. Martin was judge
of the only division of federal court we had in
those days to keep any of Governor Brownings
troops from coming into Shelby County. Now I
can't remember why they were coming in here. But
I do remember that through the influence of Mr.
Crump, Judge John D. Martin issued an order from
the United States District Court prohibiting
Governor Browning from sending troops into Shelby
County. I'm sorry I can't remember why but that

was a tremendous upheaval in that day. That was...

S.G. MANESS: This was in 1938.

MRS. ASPERO: As well as I recall.

S.G. MANESS: Between 1938 and 1940.

MRS. ASPERO: I think it was around 1940.

I had been practicing law for some time by that time.

S.G. MANESS: Did the Governor send troops in here anyway? What did Crump do?

MRS. ASPERO: Well he couldn't send the troops because the federal judge had prohibited troops from entering. I wish I could remember why Governor Browning wanted to send those troops in the first place. They were having a fierce battle, Mr. Crump and Governor Browning. So he couldn't send the troops because a federal judge had given an order against it, restraining him from having troops come. It was something I think about Browning's election.

S.G. MANESS: Do you think that Mr. Crump created a lot of problems for Governor Browning during his term?

MRS. ASPERO: Well it could be said that Governor Browning was creating problems that Mr. Crump did not approve of. I

just don't remember what. I remember this though and I think this is interesting. After these elections, in which we would work so hard to achieve victory, Mr. Crump would give a big victory party out at the Silver Slipper. Now the Silver Slipper, in those days, was a beautiful nightclub which burned long ago.

S.G. MANESS: Where was it located?

MRS. ASPERO: It was out, I think, on Macon
 Road. I remember what a
lovely party it was. And I remember that Mr.
Crump would have a half pint of bourbon for
everybody who came to the party.





